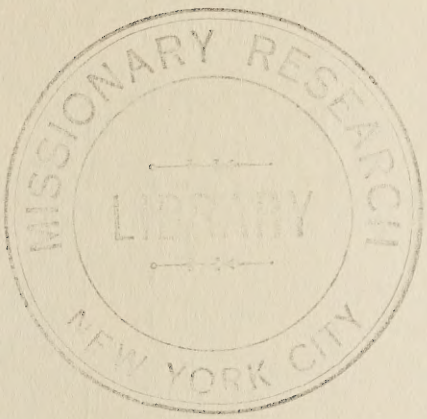
MEMORANDUM ON

THE PROMOTION AND FURTHER STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

by

CHARLES R. WATSON, M.A., LL.D.

President, The American
University at Cairo



Prepared for the Herrnhut Meeting
at the request of

THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL

New York: 1932

FOREWORD

This memorandum has been prepared under considerable pressure in response to a cabled request received June first that the writer should elaborate more fully a point of view which he had presented to the Chairman of the International Missionary Council on the eve of his departure for Europe. The background of knowledge reflected in this presentation can be traced to three major experiences of the writer in connection with the subject discussed. These are stated here merely for the purpose of explaining any limitations which may appear in the discussion due to the writer's lack of contact with certain great geographical areas within which the question of religious liberty is acute and may take on a peculiar form. The first was in Paris, when he shared with others in studying and seeking to safeguard religious liberty in the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. The second is his practical experience in Egypt as chairman of the Inter-Mission Council's Committee on Missions and Government. The third is his temporary relation to a group in New York engaged in the study of the question of Religious Liberty.

TWO OBJECTIVES TO BE DISTINGUISHED

As the title of the memorandum implies, there are two distinct objectives to be sought. These are vitally inter-related, but they should be clearly distinguished each from the other, for they lead into different fields and require radically different methods and agents for their realization. They are:

(1) The Promotion or Realization of Religious Liberty
(2) The Study and Definition of Religious Liberty.

The first is a practical aim. Its achievement must be a process, a progressive and continuous process; perhaps an endless process. Its field of action is in the mission fields concerned and with Governments controlling these mission fields,for we assume that we are only concerned with missionary problems. The Study and Definition of Religious Liberty, on the other hand, leads us to libraries, to books of political science and history, to realms of philosophy and law, and to leaders and thinkers in these spheres. The mission fields may need to be visited to catch the viewpoints and atmosphere of other cultures, other political systems than those of the West, and, of course, to determine the practical significance of the principles of religious liberty that are enunciated, but, after all, the objective here is a study of religious liberty, the discovery of certain determining and perhaps immutable principles, the working out of a Science of Religious Liberty with a compendium of its many-sided problems and varying applications.

While the two objectives are fairly distinct, they are vitally related to each other. The promotion of religious liberty assumes some worthy knowledge of the form and degree of religious liberty to be promoted; similarly a theory of religious liberty, ever so well established by logical reasoning, is of no avail unless it is effectively applied to the life of a nation.

ADVANTAGE OF THE PRACTICAL APPROACH

Both objectives named are the concern of the International Missionary Council. The problem arises as to how they shall be dealt with. Perhaps it will be possible to pursue simultaneously, through two separate and equally sustained movements, the two objectives, but if one must take precedence over the other, this memorandum would plead for a practical approach to the subject rather than a theoretical. The reasons are many.

For one thing, the situation is critical in many mission fields. It will not brook delay. Comprehensive studies of religious liberty (such as those already referred to) are very alluring. With every meeting of the group formulating the studies mentioned, something was added which some one discovered had been left out. The scheme finally became so vast and far-reaching that one felt that the practical objectives with which the group had started out had been lost sight of. The time period required for this enlarged study increased to the point that one despaired of gaining practical values in time for the needs of the hour.

Nor is this all. Unrelated to practical situations, is not a study of religious liberty likely to become too theoretical and discursive? On the other hand, the danger of superficiality in a purely practical approach to the question is both obvious and real. But may this not be avoided? Can we not command the best thinking of the international lawyer, of the student of political history, of our professors of sociology, perhaps also the best counsel of our foreign officials and State departments and diplomatic leaders, as we submit to them not theoretical questions but actual problems and seek from them practical solutions? Will not this approach, due to the concrete character of the problems presented, challenge more rugged thinking and perhaps lead to truer conclusions? Dr. Johnson who took such an active part in the recent International Survey of the Y.M.C.A. said, "I have been very interested to find that the most effective work had been done by people within the movement itself and that the study of problems undertaken by outside agencies, lacked reality."

With a view to elaborating this practical approach to the problem of religious liberty on the mission field, we need first to get a clear picture of what the promotion of religious liberty involves and then point out how the International Missionary Council may render needed assistance.

I. THE PROMOTION OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

To promote and realize religious liberty for missionary activities in foreign lands, four factors at least need to be dealt with: (1) Missions and missionaries; (2) Policies to be pursued; (3) Governments and their officials; (4) The general public.

(1) Missions and Missionaries

If religious liberty is to be promoted adequately every governmental area should have an efficient Inter-Mission Committee on Missions and Government. What is everybody's business is nobody's business and without such a responsible committee progress cannot be expected. But what makes for efficiency in such a committee?

(a) First of all, the committee should command the best minds of the missions. The subject to be dealt with is a difficult one, not easily grasped; in a sense it is foreign to ordinary missionary thought-life and training. It is to be remembered that mere numbers do not make for strength in a committee. The most capable minds should be assigned to serve in this field.

(b) Then the committee should be representative of the missions in the sense of being able to feel the pulse of the groups they represent. When presenting any matter to Government, the committee should be reasonably certain that its deliverances will command the support of the missions. Every government welcomes

such a representative committee and prefers infinitely to deal with it rather than to deal with a lot of detached missionary units.

(c) Furthermore the committee must develop a satisfactory organized and continuous life. This calls for officers, especially a chairman and secretary, who will give much time and thought to the work of the committee; also a membership that is not too changing. Continuity in thought and policy is absolutely essential to the effective promotion of religious liberty in any field. It is going to be a process covering not years but decades. A pressure needs to be exerted wisely yet persistently in a given direction, year after year. With every change of administration, at every national or political crisis issues will have to be dealt with involving religious liberty. Only a well organized and continuous committee can achieve adequate results.

(d) The committee should be equipped with a small but well selected library of books relating to religious liberty in general; also documents giving with accuracy the laws of the land or the treaty agreements under which religious liberty is allowed or disallowed. The committee needs such books of reference for their own guidance and also for the promotion of correct notions of religious liberty among the missionaries they represent.

(e) Finally, the committee should meet repeatedly for study and likewise call together selected groups of missionaries for discussion of the subject, in order to develop a common mind among missionaries within the area as to what constitutes religious liberty and what phases of it most require safeguarding or securing. The Committee in Egypt held two such conferences during this past winter each almost three hours long, attended by missionaries and representatives of the indigenous churches and even certain personally invited government officials who were in sympathy with missions. These conferences proved of great educational value and assisted greatly in the development of clearer notions and also a common mind.

(2) Policies to Be Pursued

Given in any area an efficient Committee on Missions and Government, the next factor to be dealt with is the policy to be pursued. How important it is that such a policy be both wise and broad: wise, that there may be no occasion for retracing one's steps; broad, that it may not be condemned as petty but may challenge public sentiment by its reasonableness. In working out such a policy there is need for an accurate knowledge of existing laws and treaties and likewise an appreciation of the viewpoint -- it may be social, or religious, or nationalistic -- of the country in which one is located. A knowledge of general political history and of political science and philosophy would be of incalculable value in formulating within any field the policy which is to be pursued in the promotion of religious liberty. It is at this point that the average missionary feels the need for help. He comes to this problem with no previous special training. In a few mission fields there are Christian universities whose departments of Political Science and History might contribute richly in laying down the lines to be defended or promoted. An agency like the International Missionary Council seems, however, the only agency that could naturally step into the breach and render the service required. To this reference is made later.

A wise and broad policy sustained continuously gains enormously with the passing of the years. Its objections finally become known to a wide constituency. Where other opinions divide and weaken, a consistent policy gathers to itself both bulk and momentum.

(3) Governments and Their Officials

If there has been one lesson learned out of the experience of missions in Egypt, it is the value of maintaining personal and sympathetic contacts with Government officials. With every change of a Ministry, the appropriate officials should be visited. It is amazing the degree to which certain commonplaces of knowledge need to be restated with each shift of the administration in Government. The existence of Christian missions in the country, their numbers and organization, their services to the people, their worthy and disinterested objectives, their interest in the success of each new administration -- these and a hundred other facts need to be restated to every incoming Cabinet or High Commissioner or Governor or Viceroy or President, to keep them in his consciousness and to acquaint him with their significance. We must keep in sympathetic touch with Government and Government officials, and the time to establish such sympathetic contact is in times of quiet and good will, not to put it off to times of stress and criticism.

There must also be the endeavor to establish not merely a personal contact but also a sustained reputation for fair dealing and for an intelligent grasp of all the factors which enter into the question of religious liberty in any given country. This does not spell compromise, but a mingling of accurate knowledge with a spirit of fairness. Such a reputation, established by a committee, will yield unsuspected values.

(4) The General Public

In the last analysis, it will be found that public opinion sways a nation rather than Government or officials. This past winter witnessed in Egypt an explosion of religious fanaticism that swept the Moslem press and threatened for a time serious consequences because of the feeling of hostility to missions engendered by these attacks. It was realized that a great task needed to be undertaken in the education of the public mind, especially in Moslem lands, in respect to religious liberty. Such a campaign of education was outlined. To visualize the sort of campaign proposed the following topics suggested for discussion by well chosen writers (Moslem writers in preference to Christians) may be given:

1. The death of Socrates
2. Were the Romans tolerant?
3. The intolerance of the Crusaders
4. Galileo
5. "The religion of the ruler the religion of the realm"
6. The struggle of the Non-conformists
7. The contribution of Voltaire
8. The contribution of Rousseau
9. The contribution of the Evangelical revival
10. The struggle in Japan
11. Soul tyranny the worst.

It is easy enough to outline such topics, but the real problem is in getting them treated suitably. And the great desideratum is material, accurate, dependable, pertinent, historical material. Where can the missionary go for suitable source material, up-to-date illustrations as well as historical, for a sustained campaign of public education? Help is certainly needed at this point.

II. COOPERATION OF INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL

With this sketch of a typical missionary situation before us, keeping in mind the organization on the field dealing with the problems of religious liberty, the question arises, "How may the International Missionary Council render most effective assistance?" Chiefly, it is evident, at the point of supplying material and placing within the reach of missions the best thinking of specialists on the subject. However, a more intimate relationship is required at other points also in order to normalize the assistance rendered. The following tentative program for coöperation is suggested:

Aim: "To stimulate effective organization on the mission fields to deal with the problem of religious liberty and to assist these organizations or committees in their tasks." This leaves freedom to do in each area whatever needs to be done.

Organization: A Committee of the I.M.C. should be constituted somewhat similar to the Group on Religious Liberty which has functioned so remarkably in New York during the past two years for the study of this subject. Its membership should be geographically located to permit of from two to four meetings a year without undue expense or inconvenience. A full time Secretary is urged but if funds do not permit, then one of the I.M.C. secretaries might serve as executive secretary providing he be given a full time clerical secretary capable of grasping the problems involved.

Tasks: The following are suggested:

(1) The first task would be to discover the names of persons having to do with the problem of religious liberty in the different mission fields, to establish a correspondence with them so that they may become aware of the provision which the I.M.C. has made for helping them, and to discover the particular individuals in the field who may serve as a channel for official communications and for gathering information. As the Secretary of the I.M.C. committee becomes informed as to the actual problems in each field, this correspondence will be vital and not burdensome to those on the field. His communications will be looked forward to with eagerness. While dealing initially with all the major fields, correspondence will quickly indicate which fields are alive to the problem of religious liberty, in which fields the problem is acute, and which fields possess leadership that is creative and dynamic in dealing with these problems. Naturally the activities of the I.M.C. committee must follow the lines of the greatest response and interest evidenced by this correspondence. Through this correspondence also there will be collected in the I.M.C. office all the data possible and all official papers that can be secured covering the history of cases and the legal situation that lies back of them. Such material, if properly filed and classified, will be extremely valuable in connection with the research task to which reference is made later on.

(2) A second task will be to furnish the committees on the field with material which they need. Reference has already been made to this in an earlier section of this memorandum. Out of the experience in Egypt, it may be stated that the need here is of a two-fold character. There is, after all, the need for books, pamphlets, and articles which will guide the committee on the field and clarify its thinking on the subject of religious liberty. Why could not the I.M.C. discover some method of equipping every Committee on Missions and Government with a small library usable along these lines? But there is a second need which has been almost entirely uncared for hitherto. It is the need for good material that can be worked up or into popular journals of the country, in the language of the country, to

visualize to the readers the extent to which religious liberty obtains in other parts of the world and to suggest the line along which civilized countries recognize it and allow it. It would have been of inestimable value if when the storm broke upon the missions in Egypt, they could have had material to work over into popular articles based on actual history in other fields or in other periods of time, which illustrated the growth of tolerance, the recognition of religious liberty as the characteristic of an advanced national development. Not a single voice was raised on the other side, and Moslem fanaticism went from bad to worse in its expression of intolerance. The missionaries simply did not have the material. Nor should such material be available only for times of stress but also for a steady education during days of quiet and peace. The I.M.C. committee could secure the preparation of certain basic material that would be of incalculable value for the committees on the field.

(3) Still another task is that of cultivating the boards at the home base. While the committees on the field must cultivate a sense of unity and a common mind in the missions on the field, there is need for the development of a common mind with reference to religious liberty among the boards at the home base. Such a subject as the Conscience Clause in India, or the Capitulations in the Near East, and other similar general questions, call for study and discussion so that the issues involved may be clarified and the leadership at the home base may reach common conclusions or at least understand those who differ on the subjects named.

(4) Finally, there is the further study of religious liberty by individual specialists or groups of specialists. This work will probably take two forms:

First there will be the need for a study of concrete situations and problems. Over and over again the missionary on the field comes to the end of his knowledge and feels the need of a technical knowledge of law, political science and history, which only a specialist can command. An understanding of the problem of religious liberty in Syria, for example, calls for some knowledge and appreciation of the French Colonial policies in Northern Africa. Missionaries in Egypt, for example, would have been greatly helped if some advisor acquainted with international law could have pointed out to them the relative impotence of a constitutional provision in any other country than America, as compared with the effectiveness of a concrete legal enactment. There are many leading authorities in America and Europe who would be only too glad to lay hold of concrete cases that might be submitted to them and to render as a labor of love their best service in formulating an opinion with reference to these situations. The committee on the field cannot command such specialized studies, but the I.M.C. Committee could do this. Such studies would be invaluable. They could be duplicated or even printed and sent to the groups that require the stimulus of such thinking. This is what the memorandum urges as the practical approach to the study of the problem of religious liberty. After having gone a certain distance with such practical studies and practical research in respect to concrete cases, it may be that the I.M.C. will so "find itself" with reference to the entire problem of the study of religious liberty that it may pass safely to the further task which lies beyond.

This further task is that which seems to be belittled in the earlier part of this memorandum, but which is extremely important and must ultimately come, namely, a comprehensive scientific investigation of the whole question of religious liberty. The scope and character of this larger study cannot be stated better than

in the terms formulated by a group which studied this subject in New York and which outlined it as follows:

Objective: The formulation of fundamental and universally applicable concepts of religious liberty; and the study of the degree to which these concepts of religious liberty have been and are being realized in law and in society.

Definition and Scope: The project will deal with such questions as:

1. What does the true concept of religious liberty as a fundamental and universal principle involve?

2. What are its relations to legislation, education, industry and employment, social customs and usage?

3. To what extent and in what way has it been nationally and internationally recognized and guaranteed?

4. What are the actual circumstances in which it is claimed that religious liberty is threatened, limited, or denied?

Purpose: The purpose of this project is:

1. To provide accurate data for the use of groups, coördinate thought on religious liberty and its corollaries.

2. To provide material needed and desired by many existing groups, religious or political, throughout the mission fields, in order to enable them to clarify their conceptions of religious liberty, to construct programs for its realization, and to secure its acceptance in their respective countries.

3. To afford guidance in the presence of confused or conflicting situations created by champions of extreme political nationalism, of continuity of racial cultural traditions, of new economic or social theories, of secularism, of religious intolerance, or of militant atheism.

4. To supply material for information and use within newly organized nations where new constitutions are in force and are being tested, and especially where there are religious minorities whose rights a are limited or menaced.